

VZCZCXRO2022
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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY DAKAR
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0592
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1127
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0354
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0849
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 0024
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHLMC/MCC WASHDC

UNCLAS DAKAR 000649

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

DEPT FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL AND INR/AA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [EFIN](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [SG](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT WADE'S MONUMENT TO THE REBIRTH OF AFRICA: LOOKING FORWARD IN RETURN FOR A MESS OF POTTAGE?

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. In an effort to leave a legacy for himself that identifies with the glories of Africa's past achievements and even more with Africa's future, Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade has mobilized Pierre Goudiaby Atepa, a Senegalese architect and businessman, to arrange the construction of several monuments in Dakar, most importantly the "Monument of the African Renaissance." However, the circumstances of the deal with North Korean architects and builders for the \$30m project are dubious, especially in an extremely poor country which is currently having difficulty feeding itself. END SUMMARY.

MONUMENT OF THE AFRICAN RENAISSANCE

¶2. (SBU) On 21 April, EMBOFFS met Pierre Goudiaby Atepa, President Abdoulaye Wade's architect and a successful businessman charged with being the creator and guardian of the President's monumental heritage, to enquire about the structure emerging from a hill along Dakar's western shore. Construction of the new monument, called the "Monument of the African Renaissance," is already underway. It is being built by a North Korean firm. According to Goudiaby Atepa and the multicolored plan/blueprint of the monument, the west side of the monument facing the sea will have a foundation and statue made of a bronze and concrete alloy designed to withstand the relentless Senegalese wind, seawater, and sand. The statue features a bare torsoed, muscular African man, with a child in his left arm and his right arm around the waist of a woman in African cloth draped halfway over her shoulders and body to her thighs in the style of a painting on an ancient Greek urn or perhaps a Soviet-era tribute to the masses. The man and woman attempt to rise Rodin- or Michelangelo-like from uncut rock, but the statue is really socialist realist, at once heroic and sterile. The visitor will enter from the seaside up stairs on either side of a fountain into a multistory building with a high-ceilinged space, a boutique, a museum, and a VIP lounge. The lineage between the statue at the Place du Souvenir and the Monument to the African Renaissance is obvious: Goudiaby Atepa indicated that they are in contact with the foundation that administers the Statue of Liberty in the U.S. and wish to learn about its experience in the management of museums.

WHO WILL PAY

¶3. (SBU) Goudiaby Atepa said that Senegal would offer North Korea approximately USD 30 million worth of land for development in Almadies, the most expensive neighborhood in Dakar, in exchange for materials and construction and that North Korea could do anything it wanted with it, from developing to selling it. This is another of the frequent examples of Wade assuming the role of the state in apportioning land, having already declared that he alone can negotiate and approve any projects along Senegal's coast, and, more recently, determining how vast the site will be. EMBOFFS visited

the site, in the very early stages of construction. Two North Korean workers encountered at the site told us it would take two to three years to finish the monument. An interesting sidebar to the financing arrangement is that fact that the North Korean gambit was resorted to only after an ill-conceived scheme to persuade African American sports and entertainment stars to back the project fizzled upon launch.

COMMENT: CAN'T EAT A WHITE ELEPHANT DURING THE HUNGRY SEASON

14. (SBU) According to President Wade and his architectural spokesman this monument is supposed to represent Africa's rebirth and its future and will serve as a way out of the discourse that too often focuses on the wrongs inflicted on Africa in the past without reference to what contribution Africa and Africans can make to its own future. However, trading some of the country's prime real estate in a non-transparent way to the world's most repressive regime to build a monument ostensibly in honor of Africa's future, but really a monument to the sitting President of the Republic, is nothing more than typical post-colonial African big-man politics akin to the late Ivorian President Felix Houphouet-Boigny's basilica. It is east to question the wisdom of President Wade's decision to build what many regard as a white elephant at a time when many Senegalese are eating one meal a day due to the inexorable rise in food and fuel prices.

SMITH